FRANK G. CARPENTER'S LETTER.

WHERE RICE IS KING

BURMA'S GREAT FOOD CROP WHICH ENRICHES A PEOPLE.

Its Rice Fields Could Give One Feed to All Mankind—The Big Mills of Rangoon, and How They Are Worked. Girl Laborers Who Save Money on 2 Cents a Day. Harvard Athletes Beaten by East Indian Coolies. The Hindoo Invasion of Farther India—Queer Money Lenders—Burmese Trade and American Missions. Government Education—A Nation Where the Boys Are Taught by the Monks.

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POOZOONDOUNG, India, April 1.—I have just visited the greatest rice mill of the world. It lies here at Poozoondoung, on the Irrawaddy river, below the port of Rangoon. It belongs to the Bullock brothers, who own other large mills and export thousands of tons of rice every year. Burma is about the best rice patch on the bosom of old Mother Earth. The lower part of it is a garden devoted to the cultivation of the crop, and upper Burma is more than half rice. The country has altogether rice areas equal to the state of Ohio, and its annual exports of this grain are more than two billion pounds. This is enough to give every human being on earth all the rice he could eat in one day, and still leave enough over to make a pudding for every man, woman and child, as well as sprinkle all the brides and grooms of one year. Rice is the money crop of Burma. It takes the place of wheat, corn and cotton with us. The exports sell for millions, and the people are rich or poor as the rice grows well or ill.

Increasing the Rice Crop.

The British government appreciates how much the prosperity of the country depends upon rice, and it is doing wonders in increasing the crop. It has an agricultural department whose efforts in this regard correspond with those of our department at home. It is studying seed selection, increasing the irrigated territories and making forecasts showing the possible yield. It has its agents in every part of the country, and their reports upon rice are more accurately made than our reports upon cotton. During the past five years, in which a total of 13,000,000 tons was raised for export, the government forecasts were only 2000 tons out of the way. The estimates came largely from the local officials. Burma is a land of villages. Most of the people live in little settlements of thatched huts raised upon poles; and they go outside to work. Every village has its head man, who reports to the government the number of acres his people will plant. His figures are sent to the county officials, and they send their estimate for their district on to officials of the province, the last calculations being made at Rangoon.

I do not know what Uncle Sam is doing in this line in the Philippines, but I venture he could learn much from the British in Burma.

Burma's Big Rice Mills.

But come with me and go through this rice mill at Poozoondoung. The grain is harvested as paddy. In the field it looks not unlike wheat or oats, but every kernel has a husk on it and this sticks to it as though it were glued. When the grain is ready for shipment to the mills it looks much like our wheat grains unthrashed, save that the rice husks have neither heads nor beards and they stick tight to the kernels. It takes quite as much work to get them off as to grind the thrashed wheat into flour. This is the work of these rice mills.

The Poozoondoung mill covers as much ground as any of our large flour grinding establishments. It has buildings of five stories, with single rooms as big as a good sized garden patch. I entered one on the ground floor which was packed to the ceiling with the rice paddy in bags. It held more than 2,000,000 pounds, and other rooms of equal size adjoining it were filled with the cleaned rice awaiting shipment.

Unloading the Paddy.

Rice paddy is brought here from all over Burma. It is floated down the streams to the Irrawaddy river and towed to Rangoon by steamers in flatboats and barges. The unloading is done by East Indian coolies, many of whom are quite pretty young girls. They are black, lusty and buxom, bare armed and bare necked, and often with legs bare to the knees. Not a few of them wear gold buttons in their noses and rings in their ears. They have armlets and anklets, and I saw three with rings on their toes.

These girls carry the rice from the boats to the mills in baskets of 50 pounds each. They lift the grain to their heads or shoulders, and carry it up and down the banks of the river over a plank roadway. Their hours are from daylight to dark, and their average pay is less than 2 cents an hour. I am told they are quite as strong as the men, and that they do better work, although their wages are lower.

And still they save money at 2 cents an hour and most of them make savings banks of their persons. Nearly every one I saw had more or less jewelry upon her. I remember a girl of 18 with silver bracelets covering her arm from wrist to elbow, and heavy anklets of silver on each of her legs. The lobes and rims of her ears were pierced with gold rivets, and the gold ring in her nose was as big around as a saucer and as thick as a knitting needle. This ring hung down around her mouth, and when she ate lunch she stuffed in the rice through the ring. She was a Kling from southern India, and her husband, a straight black man in a white cotton waist coat, worked with her.

Harvard Athletes vs. Hindoo Coolies.

In another room I saw the men handling the finished product. The white rice is bagged up in sacks of 226 pounds. These are carried by East Indian coolies into the warehouse and are piled up in stacks. Each lifts one of these bags to his shoulders and runs up an inclined roadway. It looks easy, and three Harvard university athletes, who visited the mill the other day, rather sneered at the strength of the Hindoos, saying that any good man could carry such a load up a plank. Thereupon the manager asked one of them to try it. He did so, getting the bag on his back without very much trouble. He was able to make his way across the room, but when he tried to go up the incline the weight pulled him over and he fell with the rice to the floor.

This same college crowd tried to pick out the broken rice grains in competition with the Hindoo girls, thinking they could work quite as fast, but had to give up in despair. The rice is of various grades, according to the broken grains in it, and every shipment has to be tested by counting the number of whole grains in a fixed quantity. It takes keen eyes and the Harvard boys failed in the test.

Polished Like Silver Spoons.

It seems strange to think of polishing rice like your best silver spoons. But that is what I saw them doing as I went through this mill. The machinery paddy or rice in the husks is first winnowed and then carried to the top story, where it is passed through grinding stones so carefully set that they pare off the husk without breaking the rice. The stones are of a composition harder than iron, and they have to be roughened every week by skilled Hindoos who understand how to fix them. After this process the rice is again winnowed. It goes through countless fans and shaking sieves being again carried to the top of the mill and descending by gravity from floor to floor, shaken, grated and cleaned at every turn. After the husk is off, the kernels are polished. This is done with chamois skin, the grains being thrown back and forth against a roller covered wit this material. The chamois cylinder goes around at the rate of 500 revolutions a minute, and when the rice flows out from it it is as clean and white as the first tooth of your baby.

It now falls through a chute into bags and is sewn up by indian girls, when it is ready for shipment abroad. Much of the export is to England, France, Germany and Holland, but a great deal goes to India, China and other parts of the far east. The Burmese rice is much better than that of Hindustan, and it brings such high prices that the natives ship their own product abroad and eat the cheaper imported rice which is sold in the markets.

The Hindoo Invasion.

Speaking of the coolies in this mill brings me to the Hindoo invasion of Burma. The East Indian coolies are being brought here by the shiploads. They are carried across the Bay of Bengal, a distance of 1000 miles or more, for less than a dollar, and by the mail steamers they can come here from Calcutta for about 64 cents. In other words the passage costs them about one-twelfth cent a mile at which rate one could go from New York to Washington for less than a quarter and from the Atlantic to the Mississippi for about a dollar.

The Burman does not like to work. He despises money; and when he gets a little ahead he acquires merit by giving it out in charity, establishing a drinking fountain or putting a plate of gold on some Buddhist shrine. The Hindoos, who work for almost nothing at home, can earn as much as $5 a month here, and the land seems an El Dorado to them. As it is now more than half of the population of Rangoon is East Indian, and there are thousands of Hindoos in every large town.

East Indian Money Sharks.

The invasion is not confined to the laboring classes. There are many Indian merchants and Chitties, or Indian bankers. The latter do about all the loaning to the individual farmers. They lend at from 25 to 40 percent a year to the Burmese, taking mortgages on their crops. The laws here are such that the Hindoos cannot own land; but the crops can be mortgaged, and the Chitty puts his agent on the farms to see that he gets his loan out of the sales.

These Chitties are the queerest lookers imaginable. Our ideal of that profession is a fat, sleek, well dressed man who looks prosperous and has the finest house in the town. The ordinary dress of the Hindoo banker would not cost an American dollar, and he lives in a hovel. His black skin is bare, with the exception of a rag of thin cotton around the loins, and a calico jacket which ends at the waist. His shaved black head is often free of turban or cap, although he may have ashes smeared over parts of it to show his caste or religion. The Chitties come from near Madras. Their only idea is to make money breed, and they save every cent. Some of them are quite wealthy, all are said to be honest, and their word is accepted by the banks for large sums. Some start in Rangoon as clerks at $12 a month. They will live on one-third that amount and loan the rest out at interest. When they have accumulated 10,000 rupees or so they go back home and live economically on the interest of their holdings thereafter.

Outside the Hindoos the most of the banking is done by the British, who have four large banks in Rangoon. These are the Hongkong and Shankhai bank, the Chartered bank of India, Australia and China, the National bank of India and the Bank of the Netherlands. All these do a general banking and exchange business, their interest rates varying according to the season of the year. They get from 10 to 17 percent, receiving the most at the planting and harvesting of the crops.

Burma's Foreign Trade.

The trade here is almost altogether in the hands of Great Britain. The officials protect the British merchants and favor them where possible, although the Germans, Japanese, Belgians and French try to compete.

As to our trade, it is small, usually amounting to less than a million dollars a year, and consisting mostly of machines, canned goods and kerosene oil. Within the past year or so we have established a consulate at Rangoon, and the man in charge, E. A. Wakefield, is doing much to push American trade. He thinks we should have a direct steamship line from here to New York and also better banking connections, as well as a wholesale depot which should keep our leading exports in stock. The total imports of the country now amount to something like $36,000,000 per annum, of which Great Britain supplies more than 55 percent.

Among the American goods sold are tools, pipe fittings, axes, typewriters and sewing machines. The Burmese of the better classes wear some American shoes, and they are beginning to eat canned goods and condensed milk. They are fond of milk, but their own cows are used chiefly as draft animals. They are importing butter, and not a few spread the condensed milk on bread in its place.

Our American Missionaries.

America should have a good trade in Burma. Our misisonaries have done more for the people in the way of education and civilization than have those of any other country. About the first Christian work done was that of the American Baptists, who sent the Rev. Adoniram Judson here in 1813. Judson made the first Burmese dictionary and grammar and he translated the bible into the vernacular. He remained here when all other foreigners fled at the time of the first troubles with England, and later, during the British-Burmese war, was thrown into prison and almost starved. The story of his sufferings is one of the most affecting in missionary history. He kept at the work, however, and did much after the British took possession of lower Burma, dying in 1850 while on a sea voyage home for his health.

Since then the Baptist mission here has steadily increased. That branch of American Protestantism seems to have chosen Burma as its special fold, and it is now spending almost a quarter of a million dollars per annum upon it. It has a large number of missionaries, over 800 native churches and about 60,000 communicants. It is carrying on a number of girls' and boys' schools, and the Baptist college at Rangoon, which has has more than 1200 students, is about the most advanced educational institution in this country. It is recognized by the British government and is affiliated with the University of Calcutta. Nearly all of the students are native Burmese and many are Christians. The institution is largely self-supporting. The students pay for their board and tuition, and not a few work their way through. Recently a manual training school has been added, and the course is such that the graduates are given the degree of B. A.

The American Methodists have a mission here, which was established about 30 years ago. They are doing considerable work in lower Burma and have numerous schools. The American Baptist Press is one of the largest and most flourishing of its kind. It publishes bibles, tracts, religious newspapers and many educational works.

Public Schools in Burma.

The British government is doing much to educate the Burmese. It is establishing schools of all kinds from kindergartens to colleges, and it has now more than 6000 public schools with about a quarter of a million pupils on the rolls. In addition, there are almost as many pupils in other schools, over 16,000 of the schools being carried on outside the government.

The public schools have about the same studies as our schools at home and their hours are somewhat similar. The students are interested in athletics and the boys drill and play football and cricket.

Taught by the Monks.

In addition there are thousands of classes taught by the monks. Every village has its monastic school and such boys as do not go to the other schools attend it. The girls dare not come near the monasteries, for the priest who would touch or talk with a woman would be defiled. It is a part of the duty of the monks to teach and they charge no tuition. The boys are taught to read and write and they learn elementary arithmetic. They study out loud and commit to memory the prayers and hymns of Lord Buddha. They are supposed to pray night and morning, one of their morning prayers reading as follows:

"How great a favor has the Lord Buddha bestowed upon me in showing me his law, by the keeping of which I may escape hell and secure my salvation."

At the close of their schooling many of the boys go into the monasteries for a time and some stay there all their lives. Others remain for a while and then come out and go into business. They all learn to read and write in the schools, and Burma, for this reason, in the point of the literacy of the men, is far in advance of any country of Asia.

Frank G. Carpenter.